

Navy Briefing Card
Fire Retardant Navy Uniforms
Dec. 12, 2012

Background: In 1996, the Navy removed the fire retardant (FR) requirements for dungaree and khakis for shipboard personnel and shifted the responsibility for meeting shipboard safety and battle dress requirements to ships via organizational clothing. The decision to discontinue FR uniform requirements as part of the sea bag was endorsed by the then-CINCLANT and CINCPAC Fleets, COMNAVSUP and CNO and approved by SECNAV—POTUS and SECDEF were also informed of the decision prior to implementation. Since its introduction in 2006, the NWU Type I has not contained fire retardant properties because commands are responsible for providing Sailors with organizational fire retardant clothing as required. The cost-effective measures taken in 1996 to ensure personnel who were required to wear fire retardant components based on their work environment or task assigned remains true today. It is not cost-effective to put every Sailor in a FR Type I working uniform at boot camp and expect that uniform to maintain its FR characteristics or for the Sailor to recognize when those characteristics are lost and replace them.

Messages

- Since 1996, there hasn't been a fleet requirement to have fire retardant uniforms for all-hands. Where there is a need, fire retardant/flame-resistant clothing is provided.
- Recently, we conducted an impromptu test, which demonstrated that the NWU is not a flame-resistant uniform.
- The Navy is constantly looking at uniform requirements to ensure the safety of our sailors.

Talking Points

- Since 1996, commands have been required to purchase flame resistant organizational clothing for sailor use—there has been no change in this requirement. Therefore, the NWU Type I was appropriately designed without flame resistant qualities.
- Key factors leading to narrowly focused use of fire retardant uniforms included:
 - There was no reported or documented evidence of shipboard personnel receiving severe body burns as a result of wearing non-FR uniform materials/fabrics.
 - Fire retardant uniforms failed key aspects of Fleet wear test and were too costly (e.g., a set of FR dungarees in the early 90s cost the same as a set of NWU Type I's today).
 - Organizational clothing could be provided, on a more cost-effective basis, for those personnel requiring fire retardant components to accomplish daily or specific tasks.
 - Commanders could ensure full- fire retardant components were worn by Sailors who were working in an environment requiring fire retardant components.
- In 2012, FR NWU Type II/III and coveralls became part of the Navy's organizational clothing inventory. The Navy began issuing flame resistant organizational gear (FROG) I and II in the NWU Type II and III pattern to Navy ground force personnel deploying to Afghanistan and those conducting operations in environments where improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are a common threat.

- On Oct. 15, 2012, an impromptu test by the Navy clothing textile research facility in Natick, Ma. reinforced the fact that the NWU Type I is not flame resistant, and further found that when subjected to flame it will burn robustly until completely consumed.
- As stated in a message from the Navy Safety Center dated 061857Z OCT 11, Sailors were notified that NWU Type I lack flame resistant qualities. There are currently no Navy uniforms in the seabag developed purposefully to fight a shipboard fire, however, every Navy ship is equipped with the fire fighting ensemble (FFE) and personal protective equipment (PPE) to combat shipboard fires.
- There has been no change in the requirement for fire retardant coveralls for shipboard personnel assigned to engine rooms aboard surface ships and other designated environments at sea and ashore. Personnel assigned as members of fire fighting teams are provided FR ensembles to combat fires aboard ships.
- We are constantly exploring long-term solutions that afford our Sailors the right protective clothing, aligned with the tasks they are required to perform in various operating environments. USFF and PACFLT are continuing to review the requirements for -- and flame resistant qualities of -- working uniforms, including the NWU Type I.